

NATHANAEL BURWASH

Finding Aid Prepared by
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH--NATHANAEL BURWASH

Born on July 25, 1839 in St. Andrews, Quebec, Nathanael Burwash was the eldest son of Adam and Anne Taylor Burwash. Nathanael's great grandfather, a descendent of the English baron Sir Anthony de Bergesh, had settled in Vermont around 1765, but, following the American Revolutionary War, had moved to the Riviere Rouge area of British North America where Nathanael's father was born. Anne Taylor, Nathanael's mother, had been born in Scotland and raised as a Presbyterian, but, like his father, was converted to Methodism as an adolescent. Her brother, Lachlin, became a prominent Methodist preacher and acted as an agent for the Upper Canada Bible Society and Methodist Missionary Society. Both of Nathanael's parents were extremely devout, and his mother was a particularly powerful force in his early spiritual and intellectual development.

In 1844, the family moved to Baltimore, a farming community near Cobourg, Ontario, and Nathanael attended local schools. He entered Victoria College as a preparatory student in the fall of 1852, but left in 1855 before completing his degree in order that his younger brother John might have the funds to enrol. Nathanael secured a position as a public school teacher and was able to resume his studies at Victoria by 1857. He graduated as the class valedictorian in 1859 and spent the following year tutoring classics and mathematics at Victoria while serving as a local preacher at Baltimore. He then worked under William Pollard in the Newburgh circuit and became a candidate for the Methodist ministry in 1861. Subsequently stationed in Belleville and Toronto, Burwash was ordained in 1864 and posted to the Hamilton city circuit soon afterwards. In June 1866, he served for a few days as an acting chaplain with the Canadian forces repelling the Fenian raid near Niagara--an action for which he was later decorated.

Burwash was asked to return to Victoria College as an instructor in the natural sciences; in order to prepare for this position, he attended the Sheffield School of Science at Yale during the fall of 1866 and received his M.A. from Victoria at the end of the spring term. Although Burwash had relatively little background in this new field, he fulfilled his teaching duties creditably, and his respect for science was such that he later applied the scientific method of induction based on independent observation to theological thinking.

Nevertheless, Burwash had only accepted the position at Victoria on the understanding that he would eventually teach theology, and, with this goal in mind, he received a B.D. degree from the Garrett Biblical Institute of Evanston, Illinois in 1871. In the same year, he began teaching Hebrew, Biblical History and Systematic Theology in addition to his science courses. In 1873, Burwash was appointed as the dean of the new faculty of theology which had been established after a generous bequest to Victoria from the Edward Jackson estate. During the first few years, the faculty found itself constantly shortstaffed and underfunded, and Burwash clashed with both Chancellor Nelles and the General Conference as he struggled to enhance the position of his department. As secretary of the Educational Society of the Methodist Church from 1874 until 1886, he travelled throughout Ontario soliciting larger donations for Methodist higher education. Burwash felt strongly about the need for an educated Methodist ministry, and, in 1877, he helped set up the Theological Union of Victoria University--an organization designed as a postgraduate extension of theological study.

In December 1868, Burwash married Margaret Proctor of Sarnia. Prior to her marriage, Margaret had taught at the Wesleyan Female College in Hamilton and had been the Preceptress of the Ladies' Academy in Sackville, New Brunswick; she matched Nathanael's deep religious faith and quiet

intelligence. They had twelve children of whom only four sons (Edward, Lachlin, Nathanael Alfred and Adam Proctor) lived past adolescence.

Upon Dr. Nelles' death in 1887, Burwash moved to new prominence and responsibilities as the chancellor of Victoria during its transition from an independent institution in Cobourg to a federated college of the provincial university in Toronto. Burwash had been deeply involved in the negotiations surrounding federation: it was a modified form of his proposed scheme for affiliation which was eventually adopted in 1887 and put into effect in 1892 when Victoria moved to Toronto. Although some Methodists were upset by the loss of independent status, Burwash contended that federation was Victoria's only avenue to the government support necessary for survival. The expansion of Victoria under Burwash's leadership was remarkable--both in physical and intellectual terms. After his retirement from the chancellorship in 1913, Burwash continued to teach doctrinal history at Victoria until his death on March 30, 1918.

The list of Burwash's accomplishments is most impressive. In addition to an S.T.D from Northwestern University in 1876, he received an honorary LL.D from the University of Toronto in 1892. His long years of work on the University Senate and the Ontario Educational Council meant that he exerted tremendous influence on the educational system of Ontario at all levels. In 1902, he was elected to the Royal Society of Canada and became sectional president in 1906. Burwash was a founding member of both the Canadian Methodist Historical Society and the Canadian Authors' Club. He was a director of the Ontario Educational Association, the Canadian Peace and Arbitration Society, and the Methodist Social Union and a member in good standing of such organizations as the Canadian Historical Association, the Upper Canada Bible Society, the

United Empire Loyalist Association, and the Freemasons. In 1912, he was made an honorary lieutenant colonel in the militia for his role in promoting cadet corps and officer training in the schools. Burwash's stature in the Methodist Church was reflected by his election as president of the Bay of Quinte Conference in 1889, his position as a delegate to several Methodist ecumenical conferences, his membership on the committee for the Twentieth Century Thanksgiving Fund in 1898, and his pivotal role as a member of the joint committee on church union in 1907 and 1908.

Considering the demands of his university and church duties, Burwash's accomplishments as an author were highly respectable. His published works included a commentary on Wesley's Doctrinal Standards (1881), A Handbook of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (1887), Inductive Studies in Theology (1896), A Manual of Christian Theology on the Inductive Method (1900), a biography of Egerton Ryerson (1902), and The History of Victoria College published posthumously in 1927. Although his writings were not considered to be outstandingly original, they were widely regarded as displaying a high standard of scholarship and were frequently used as textbooks for ministerial candidates. According to his successor, Chancellor Bowles,

No man in Canadian Methodism has influenced and guided the thinking of the ministry of the Church to so great an extent as Dr. Burwash. He was always abreast of his times, his great learning, his openmindedness and his candor made him a teacher of great efficiency and power. Hundreds of Methodist ministers regard themselves as under deep obligation to him as their reverend and trusted teacher.

The Globe. April 1, 1918.

The Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression
Toronto

May 20th,
1918

Dear Mrs. Barwash -

I do not know why I should
look each day for a line from
your dear hand but I find
I have been doing that.
Are you well and when are
you coming back to Toronto?
Tomorrow evening our Commencement
Exercises begin with the presentation
of Twelfth Night by our students.
On Wednesday morning we have
an open meeting in the
Gymnasium, on Wednesday.

afternoon we give a Receptive
for the Graduates and their friends
Then on Thursday Evening Commencement
The Rev Dr. Law of Knox College
and Captain Pauline will address
the graduates.

I know dear of your interest -
and I want to tell you
everything.

Last evening we spent with
Mr and Mrs R. Y. Eaton discussing
matters pertaining to the School.
Mr Eaton said the Students had
made good in their teaching
at the Club.

The Girls of the Club declaring
they were fine women as well

as fine teachers.

23.2
Now dear I will be free to go
for you on Friday of this week
so any day after that let me
know when, and what your plans
are and I will arrange mine
accordingly. Mrs Eaton and
Mrs R. Y. Eaton would like to have
you go to see them while you are
with us. I told them I would let
them know later on.

This a beautiful summer day
My husband and Dorothy join
me in loving remembrances

Faithfully yours
Garnett H. Macmillan



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